



9 February 2026

Dear Fellow Pilgrims in Christ,

“When people are baptised, grace hides her presence until the soul makes a decision.” (Diadochus of Photike)

How much do you know about Diadochus of Photike?! I have to confess that I knew next to nothing about him when I came across this extract of his writings in Olivier Clement’s famous book, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (London: New City, 1993), in a chapter on prayer. But his words, the words of this fifth century bishop in what is now Greece, stood out for me.

In matters of faith, I have long been interested in where ‘agency’ lies with us and where it lies with God’s (e.g. ‘You did not choose me but I chose you...’ in John 15). So, it is striking to me that, according to +Diadochus, after our baptism there is yet more ‘decision-making’ at the deepest level of our being if we are to draw closer to Jesus. Diadochus continues encouragingly:

“when the whole person has turned to the Lord then with an unspeakable tenderness [grace] reveals her presence to the heart.”

This rings true to me. I love the idea that as we grow into our baptismal inheritance - a yearning to go deeper into prayer and communion - God reveals yet more to us.

I wonder what God is working among you - and among me - as we approach this season of Lent? What do we need to recommit ourselves to at this present moment?

All through my working life, whether in the Church or the University, I have always needed to tell myself that I can escape if the going gets too tough or unpleasant! I have never needed to take this imaginary ‘bolt hole’ but I find the thought that there is an exit - some remote mountain croft I could disappear into - consoling.

In our challenging times, I wonder if the desire to escape, to get away, or leave it all behind, is a feeling that a lot of us experience. We hear, for instance, of people turning off the news because they find it too depressing or they are fearful of what the next horror might be. Perhaps it’s a legacy of Covid but there is a sense at the moment - that many of us feel - that something is not right, that the things that we have taken for granted, that have given our life meaning, pleasure, and stability, are no longer so secure. It’s unsettling and at times frightening.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that we might feel tempted to try and cut ourselves off from the worst excesses of the world. But is this a Christian response or even an option for followers of Jesus?

These issues were brought into focus recently in an article by Mark Clavier reviewing Paul Kingsnorth’s impressive book, *Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of*

*Humanity* (London: Particular Books, 2025), which I read during the Christmas break. Kingsnorth captures well so much that is wrong with our society and the wider world, particularly some of the more dehumanising and destructive aspects of economics and technology or, to use Clavier's phrase, 'the flattening logic of managerial culture' that is sucking the life out of community and vibrant local cultures.

At the same time, Clavier detects in Kingsnorth's response a desire to try and hide away, to extricate oneself from the world, and somehow try and live an untainted life - all things I sometimes feel on a bad day! But, as Clavier rightly says, for Christians this must be resisted. Withdrawal may be an option for the privileged but it is not an option for most people and it isn't the vocation of Christians. Rather, Clavier writes:

"The Christian impulse...takes up its cross and moves straight into the heart of corruption and suffering for the sake of those most affected...[F]aithful witness demands that we stand with those who bear [the] heaviest burdens: the exploited, the vulnerable, and the marginalised, whose lives reveal the...true cost [of our sinful world]."

Therefore, Christians don't escape the world they "endure it, judge it, and reveal its contingency through their costly fidelity". What we do in our churches week in week out - in our prayer, our worship, our reading scripture, our breaking bread together - far from being tired, dried up, meaningless acts, are acts of awesome power by which we expose the principalities and powers for what they are, and proclaim the world's true King, while remaining "open to the possibility that even compromised institutions may yet be renewed under Christ's judgement".

We will rarely be thanked or admired for what we do. Indeed, many people will be perplexed by our actions, unconvinced that prayer changes anything. But it is not true. What we do makes all the difference in the world.

I give thanks to God for the churches of the Kingston Episcopal Area, for your creativity, imagination and determination, particularly when things are difficult or don't turn out as we expect. We are communities of "patient witness" waiting on God, listening, praying for the softening of hearts and that the world may come to believe.

Against this backdrop, it is good to be able to commend to you one of our own, Joshua Rey's book - *A Season of Silence: Deep Listening in a Noisy World* (London: Canterbury Press, 2025) - as my Lent book. Please consider joining with me in reading it this Lent. Escape from the world may not be an option but deep listening is definitely needed, and it is a gift the Church can bring, helping people make sense of each other, rediscovering our humanity in Christ, in our troubled and confusing world.

May you turn yet more to Jesus and may grace reveal her presence to you, and those whom you serve, with an unspeakable tenderness.

Best wishes and prayers,

+ Martin

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